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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*Sino-Soviet Relations:
From Worse to Worst*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
31 January 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Sino-Soviet Relations: From Worse to Worst

Introduction

Sino-Soviet rivalry is, to both sides, a highly debilitating phenomenon. Not only have the two countries forfeited all the benefits of cooperation, but the foreign policy of each must be devoted in large part simply to negating that of the other. In the process, neither has been able to prevent its smaller Communist allies from enlarging their own areas of independence. Each must add new military requirements to already burdensome commitments and each must now contemplate the prospect of sustained, long-term challenge, however ineffective it may be at present, to the legitimacy of its own regime.

The US has added a new dimension to this rivalry by simultaneously developing positive dealings with both the USSR and China. Moscow and Peking now seem equally concerned to exploit their relations with Washington to the other's detriment, and equally fearful that the other may accomplish the same thing. They can hardly fail to notice, however, that it is the US which has placed itself in a position to gain the most from this triangular relationship.

It would seem to stand to reason, then, that at some point the Soviets and the Chinese would individually reach the judgment that all-out rivalry was proving

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too costly and that the two would then move seriously toward composing their differences. The trouble with this line of argument, however, is that it has "stood to reason" for a long time now without--tactical moves aside--really affecting the basic behavior of the two sides.

Only a deeply felt set of emotional beliefs, in which national, ideological, and racial factors all reinforce one another, would seem to account for the impasse in which they have become locked. Each side recognizes the price it is paying, but neither is able to find any better consolation than the hope--a vain hope, in our view--that a more sensible leadership will somehow emerge in the opposing capital. As of now, it is difficult to foresee any but the most superficial improvements in the Sino-Soviet relationship.

1. Relations between the Soviet Union and China have worsened so much over the past 15 years that each has come to regard the other as its principal antagonist. Their rivalry is now so pervasive that, when any major new international issue arises, they instinctively tend to range themselves on opposing sides. The basic issues and attitudes separating the USSR and China are so deep-seated that they are unlikely to change under successor leaderships. As recent events have indicated, the prospect is for a continued high level of bilateral tension and increased competition abroad as Peking emerges into world affairs.

China Emerging

2. China's more adroit diplomatic tactics of the last two years have intensified Sino-Soviet competition for political influence abroad. During the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-69), Moscow's attempts to contain and discredit China were made easy by Peking's wild behavior abroad and radical policies at home. During 1971, however, China's more flexible posture won it diplomatic relations with 15 countries--among them several key Western states--and a seat at the United Nations. All this greatly complicates what Moscow sees as an urgent task. From the Kremlin's viewpoint, it has become more necessary, and at the same time more difficult, to halt the further spread of Chinese influence abroad.

3. Peking's active diplomacy was in part the result of pressures applied by the USSR in 1969, after armed fighting had broken out on the Sino-Soviet frontier. These events brought home to the Chinese the reality of their relative isolation on the international scene and their vulnerability to Soviet intimidation. Peking set out to build up the kind of diplomatic support that might help lessen its isolation and exposure to threats from Moscow.

4. The Chinese at the same time moved aggressively to exploit Soviet vulnerability abroad, in particular to exacerbate problems between the USSR and its more restive neighbors. Moscow reacted strongly. Last summer, for example, the Soviets pulled few punches in their efforts to counter Chinese inroads in the Balkans, an area where Soviet power can still evoke fear, if not respect. Moscow's primary aim was to disabuse the Romanians and Yugoslavs--and by extension other countries--of the notion that they could use ties with Peking as a pressure point against the USSR. The abusive Soviet campaign succeeded in persuading the Romanians and Yugoslavs to respond to China's overtures with more discretion but not to cease their cultivation of ties with Peking.

The Sino-Soviet-US Nexus

5. It was Peking's opening to the US, however, that presented Moscow with its most serious challenge. Although the Chinese motivation in pursuing contacts with the US is not exclusively anti-Soviet, China clearly hoped that signs of a new Sino-US modus vivendi would rattle the Soviets and has done nothing to allay Soviet suspicions. Indeed Peking has publicly spoken of its gestures toward the US as isolating a single "die-hard" enemy--read the USSR.

6. The implications for Soviet interests of steps toward detente between the US and China are enormous. Well before last summer the Russian leaders had spent considerable time worrying about the problem. Though already alerted, and disquieted, by last spring's "ping pong diplomacy," they were hardly prepared for the 15 July announcement that President Nixon would visit Peking. It was an unwelcome shock. It frustrated Moscow's efforts to contain China. More importantly, it intensified Soviet concern that over the longer term the USSR's two major rivals might team up to induce a marked change in the world balance of power detrimental to the USSR.

7. In addition to this general apprehension, the Soviets have a host of more specific concerns. Already deeply troubled by Peking's growing nuclear capability, they are afraid, for example, that wider ties with the West may afford the Chinese readier access to sophisticated technology that will strengthen China economically and militarily. Moreover, they no doubt anticipate that relaxation of Sino-US tensions over Taiwan or Vietnam could free some Chinese military units for redeployment to positions closer to the Sino-Soviet border. In sum, the Russians fear that rapprochement with the US would permit China to devote even more energy to its offensive against the USSR.

8. Small wonder, then, that Moscow in late July let loose a spurt of anti-Chinese invective--a "pent-up flood" of charges, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Even if Peking had been less blatant in divulging the anti-Soviet thrust of its intentions, it is likely that the Soviets resent Peking's role more than Washington's in moves toward rapprochement. In Moscow's view, the Chinese are more malicious and pose the more annoying and proximate threat to Soviet interests. Moreover, there is a deep historical bad feeling between Russians and Chinese, the kind of ingrained antagonism that does not separate Peking from Washington--or Moscow from Washington.

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9. Over the past few years, Peking has made the USSR enemy number one, and Moscow clearly reciprocates. The two countries are at loggerheads on issues directly relating to the territorial integrity and national security of both states. They are fierce ideological and political competitors throughout the "progressive" world. The mutual antagonism is likely to intensify as each attempts to exploit its dealings with the US in order to weaken the other.

10. The Soviet leaders apparently are determined not to play into Peking's hands by jeopardizing Soviet-US ties. Indeed, recent Sino-US

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contacts seem to have given the Russians added incentive to breathe new life into Moscow's own dealings with Washington. Elsewhere, the USSR has taken initiatives designed to blunt the effects of Chinese moves and, where possible, to turn them to Moscow's advantage. On the Indian subcontinent, for example, the Soviets were able to take advantage of India's concern over US moves toward China, as well as New Delhi's need for great-power support during the crisis in East Pakistan, to nail down the Indians to the close relationship imbedded in the Soviet-Indian Treaty signed in August. In addition, the unprecedented vigor with which the top Soviet leaders engaged in personal diplomacy abroad last fall indicated the priority Moscow has given to efforts to recapture the initiative.

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12. Shortly thereafter, the first face-to-face confrontations between Soviet and Chinese representatives at the UN in late November resulted in a new genre of personal invective sending shock waves--and considerable disillusionment--throughout the General Assembly.

13. One of the subjects at issue was the fighting in South Asia. The Soviet leaders were no doubt happy with India's military performance in East Pakistan, and gratified that Moscow's strong support for New Delhi enhanced the Soviet position there. These gains were made, however,

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at a certain cost. Moscow's propaganda was somewhat defensive as it attempted to explain how the Soviet Union wound up on the side of an isolated minority in the vote on a cease-fire resolution in the General Assembly, which passed by 104 to 11. Worse still, in Moscow's view, was the fact that Peking and Washington were generally on the same side of this sensitive issue. The sight of China and the US working in tandem on a matter of importance can only have reinforced Russian suspicions that the two are predisposed toward "collusion" against Soviet interests.

14. Moscow's propaganda organs have played heavily on the theme of Sino-American "collusion" in order to blacken Peking, particularly for allegedly betraying the North Vietnamese. The Soviets think that this line can be used to good effect with foreign Communists and other "progressive" forces, and Moscow has kept hammering it home. Increased US air strikes against North Vietnam in December gave the Soviets an unusually good opportunity to ring changes on this theme. The Soviets undertook to heighten Hanoi's suspicions and discredit the Chinese by stressing that Peking's mild reaction to the raids was designed to avoid aggravating Sino-American relations before the President's visit. The Soviet military newspaper Red Star charged that Chou En-lai "could have stopped these raids" merely by hinting that they would disrupt the visit of his "new-found friend in the White House."

Bilateral Relations

15. Other aspects of Sino-Soviet relations are also sour, and issues such as the disputed border between the two countries are as far from resolution as ever. Border talks have been under way in Peking since October 1969. It has been rough sledding. There are, in fact, hints that the Soviets were not fully prepared for either the high degree of competence, or the stubbornness, of the Chinese negotiators.

16. One Soviet diplomat who served on the Russian border talks delegation grudgingly remarked that the Chinese diplomats were "the best he had ever seen, very disciplined and difficult to influence." He went on to complain that the Chinese "only work and sleep; you cannot get to them." The Soviet diplomat added that the Chinese were better prepared than the Soviet team and that on several occasions the USSR had to stall the talks in order to get rebuttal material from Kremlin archives.

17. In general terms, the Russians continue to seek a limited accord, including firm demarcation of disputed areas. The Chinese are pushing for something more; they insist that the Soviet military buildup is the major source of trouble and call for a mutual troop withdrawal. Occasionally the Chinese renew their demand that the USSR acknowledge that the Tsars seized some 590,000 square miles of Chinese territory, under what Peking calls "unequal" treaties, but the Soviets naturally refuse to discuss the matter.

18. The talks currently are being conducted at the "deputy level" in the absence of Moscow's chief negotiator, Leonid Ilichev. Ilichev left the talks in November

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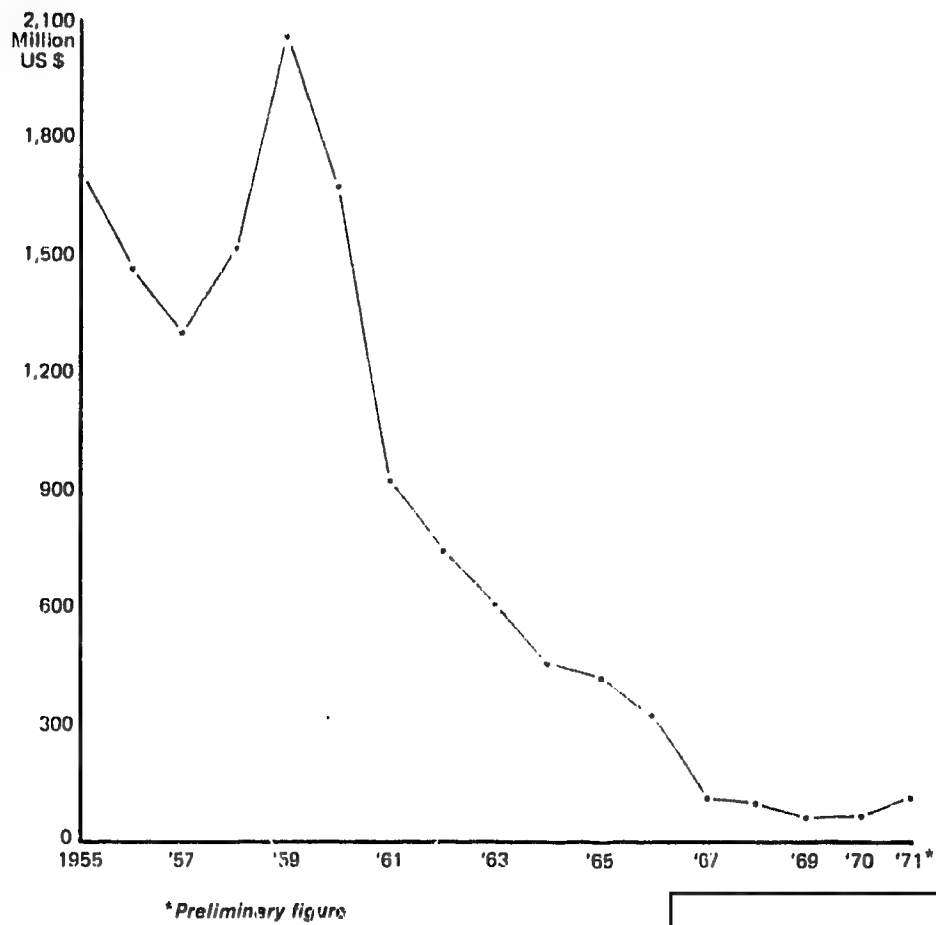
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The negotiations will probably continue to drag on, however, in spite of the lack of progress. They have helped to cool down the situation along the frontier, and the two sides seem to share a common interest in preventing a sharp deterioration of conditions there.

19. One of the most sensitive, and particularly galling, irritants between the Chinese and Soviets is their habit of meddling in each other's domestic affairs and of gloating over the other's internal political problems. Moscow, for example,

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Estimated Sino-Soviet Trade, 1955-Present



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has sought to exploit the Lin Piao affair to discredit Peking's policies, especially the invitation to the President. The Soviets seized on a mysterious plane crash in Mongolia to contribute to the picture of instability in China. Although the plane crash took place on 12 September, the Soviets waited until the eve of China's National Day--nearly three weeks later--to announce the incident. Moscow now appears chagrined that the new political alignment in China has not moderated Peking's policies toward the USSR, and for the first time the Soviets have started to attack Chou En-lai personally. They are especially vitriolic about the role he is playing in Peking's dialogue with Washington.

20. Despite continued bilateral strains and intensified competition abroad, both Moscow and Peking have tried to avoid the diplomatic and political abyss they faced in 1969 when hostilities erupted along the Sino-Soviet frontier. Ambassadorial ties [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] were restored in 1970. The annual river navigation talks have been going on in Peking since December, although there is no expectation that the two sides will be able to solve their differences even on this minor topic. Normally these talks deal with technical matters related to use of the border rivers [REDACTED]

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The Economic Prospects

21. In late 1970 the two sides signed their first trade agreement since 1967, and trade in 1971 was believed to have increased to about \$130 million from the previous year's rock-bottom level of \$45 million. The Soviets have continued to deliver a few transport aircraft to China, including IL-62 long-range jet transports. The value of Soviet aircraft delivered in 1971 reached \$20 million,

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equalling the previous peak year for Soviet aircraft deliveries. These planes made up a sizable portion of the increase in Chinese imports from the USSR.

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The Military Dimension

22. Moscow continues to regard its military strength along the border with China as an essential ingredient and a high card in its dealings with Peking. The Soviets may feel a little more comfortable that the Chinese will not embark on rash ventures along the frontier now that the Cultural Revolution is past. They probably reason that Soviet military muscle made a telling impression on the Chinese during the 1969 border fighting.

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These ground and air forces total about 360,000 men--some 70,000 less than Soviet forces stationed in Eastern Europe.

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25. The Soviet build-up since 1965 has probably given the USSR more forces along the Sino-Soviet border than it would need to repulse a Chinese attack. These forces would require development of adequate support and considerable reinforcement before they would be capable of major offensive operations against the peripheral regions of China.

26. Moscow considers the units it has deployed on the frontier a potent political weapon. With these superior forces the Soviet leaders are ensured that they can deal with China from a position of strength. Moscow may be convinced, for example, that the mere presence of its troops along the Sino-Soviet border was an important factor inhibiting the Chinese from becoming involved in the conflict between India and Pakistan late last year. In any case, the Soviets undoubtedly did their best to get maximum mileage out of this possibility in their attempts to score points with the Indians.

27. The Chinese viewed the Soviet build-up with growing apprehension and have now adjusted their own military forces accordingly. Although the Chinese apparently do not think Soviet military action is imminent, there are numerous indications that they are preoccupied with the possibility of Soviet attack. Former French Premier Mendes-France, who completed a three-week trip to China last December, was impressed by China's obsession with the Soviet forces, which the Chinese described as "a million men poised on our border." As noted above, the actual combat strength of Soviet forces arrayed against China is only 360 thousand, but, if all Soviet forces of all kinds in the Soviet Far East and Central Asia are brought up to strength, the total could approach a million.

28. The Soviet build-up was not met by a comparable Chinese response until after the border

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clashes of 1969.

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30. China's military forces could not engage in a sustained assault on the Soviet Union. They could not stop a major Soviet air or ground attack. They would be capable of inflicting heavy casualties on an invading force, however, and the Chinese hope this fact will deter Soviet military action. The Chinese, of course, are well aware of their military vulnerability and are pushing their advanced weapons programs ahead to obtain a more credible deterrent.

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